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Editor of Death

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EDITOR OF DEATH

Stephen Corey

In those earliest years I chose the line
measuring the softest skin I knew, there
along the crease of her uppermost thigh,
at the edge of the pubic hair spreading
inward to those other forms of softness.

Next I liked poems of further devotion,
love that knew lust but peeped beyond its wall.
Also, soon, the songs of new life grabbed me:
babies in bloody emergence, toddlers
on the grass or beach, first words on the air.

I saw where all of this was going,
but still I made my choices, my holdings,
cuts, and perfectings: "Drop *this*, polish *that*."
There was no stopping my love for the art
that told me what I loved, what never stopped.

Poems of fucking came to embarrass me,
but only through those few brief years
I pretended youth was gone, pretended aging.
I sought out tryst and *triste* for opposing
pages, mirrors of lovers and dying parents.

Past fifty, I started to think—poor boy—
that thought could buy back sex, banish failure,
run St. Elmo's fire up every mast . . .
too old now to believe I was older,
old enough to write the previous line.

One thing equals one poem—then move on:
her astonishing ass, naked above me
as we climbed the ladder to the loft;
my father in the room I never saw,
his last breaths at 3 a.m.—my birth time;
my first child home in her bassinet, lying
asleep since our trip from the hospital—
her tininess so terrifying, the ten
fingers of her hands fingers of *my* hands
curling, stretching, editing death away.